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CIA 4 US - uranium

Testimony in Uranium Case Sparks a Hill-Agency Fight

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Two committees in the House are in a fight with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission over whether they were told the truth about whether uranium was ever diverted out of the United States to make nuclear weapons for Israel.

The battle has been joined over what Interior Committee Chairman Morris K. Udall called a "misrepresentation of the facts" by NRC Executive Director Lee V. Gossick about whether there was any evidence of theft 10 years ago from a uranium fabrication plant in Apollo, Pa. Gossick had testified before the Commerce Committee last summer that the NRC had "no evidence that a significant amount of nuclear material has been stolen" from Apollo.

Last month, Udall wrote NRC Chairman Joseph M. Hendrie that, in view of briefings Udall received from the FBI, the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Council, "we believe it to have been a serious misrepresentation of the facts to suggest ... that there is no evidence of a diversion."

Neither Udall nor his aides would comment on what he had been told in the briefings by the security agencies. Sources have said the briefings included "circumstantial evidence" that Israel had built an atomic bomb out of highly enriched uranium about the same time that more than 200 pounds of the same material was missing from the Apollo plant, operated by the Nuclear Materials and Equipment Corp.

Less than two weeks ago, Hendrie and Gossick wrote Udall in separate but attached letters that there never was any intention to mislead any congressional committee.

Hendrie conceded that a "qualified 'no conclusive evidence' is more appropriate" than a flat "no evidence" statement but insisted Gossick tried

"in good faith" to state what he thought the full commission believed. Hendrie stressed that Gossick had not been present when commissioners Victor Gilinsky and Donald Kennedy were briefed by the CIA on its doubts about what happened to the missing uranium.

Director Gossick pointed out in his letter to Udall that he had not been at the CIA briefing but that he had been told by Gilinsky that he and Kennedy felt "there has been no evidence to indicate that any diversion has taken place."

The matter might have been put to rest except that Gilinsky wrote to Commerce Subcommittee Chairman John D. Dingell to "correct the record." Gilinsky said that Gossick's statement "did not represent my view, a view I made clear to him, to the other commissioner, and to the NRC staff."

"My view is now, as it was then," Gilinsky said in a letter dated Dec. 12, "that no such categorical statement is possible."

Both Udall and Dingell are now asking themselves if they should have open hearings to air the issue in public. Should hearings be held, it's likely that Department of Energy officials will be called to testify about what they have been told by the CIA, FBI and NSC to see if it matches what Congress and the NRC have been told.